

FBI Suspect Visits Marina Oswald

THE release of previously Top Secret FBI documents show that soon after the assassination the FBI considered Priscilla Johnson to be a suspect in the JFK killing. This conclusion takes on added significance since the Bureau reached that conclusion about only one other person — Lee Harvey Oswald. Subsequently, the Directors of the FBI and the CIA decided to adopt the position that Oswald had acted alone.

Marina Oswald, the widow of the accused assassin, was placed under house (or in this case, motel) arrest by the federal police. The CIA, FBI and Secret Service decided who might see her. She was briefed regularly by federal police agents before she testified. All of her belongings were thoroughly searched by FBI and CIA specialists. They found minute particles of evidence, including fingerprints and a pubic hair, which they claimed had fallen from Oswald's groin area.

The agents were searching for some proof that Oswald had been to Mexico City during September and October, 1963. No such proof could be discovered.

In fact, Marina Oswald originally told FBI agents that she had no knowledge that her husband might have made such a trip. In her various appearances before the Warren Commission, beginning in February 1964, Marina never stated that she knew that Lee had visited Mexico.

The CIA required proof that Oswald had been to Mexico City. Its evidence from Mexico had fallen apart.

A decision was made in the upper echelons of the intelligence organizations that Priscilla Johnson, previously judged to be a suspect in the assassination, should be permitted to visit Marina. This intelligence decision was unusual. Marina's own mother-in-law had not been permitted to visit Marina. The attorney for Oswald's interests before the Warren Commission had been denied permission to visit Marina, on the grounds that he might possibly influence her testimony or might even plant some evidence with her. Reporters for major newspapers were denied permission to visit Marina for fear they might influence her with their questions. During this period, which lasted about one year, the federal intelligence agencies continued to brief Marina and to threaten her with deportation if she did not accept their view of the events.

Under the circumstances, it seemed peculiar that the CIA and FBI would make a rare exception and permit Priscilla Johnson, a "reporter," to visit Marina — particularly since Ms. Johnson had previously been determined to be a murder suspect.

The meeting between Marina and Priscilla took on almost historic proportions. For oddly enough, at that moment and in Priscilla's presence Marina came upon important documents she had never seen before. And it was Priscilla who explained to Marina the importance of the newly discovered evidence. The documents were bus tickets which helped the then desperate CIA support its allegation that Oswald had been to Mexico City.

Warren Commission document 49 is an FBI report dated November 23, 1963, which states that Priscilla Johnson was "an employee of the State Department." Ms. Johnson publicly denied that charge. Later, on a national television program, when confronted by the evidence, she

admitted that she had worked for the State Department.

CIA document 646-277, a memorandum for the record regarding the presence of Priscilla Johnson's name in Lee Harvey Oswald's personal notebook, was heavily censored before being released. One statement about Ms. Johnson that is visible reads, "She has apparently been employed on a part-time basis within the U.S. Embassy during two periods of residence in Russia."

Just before the Warren Commission issued its Report in September 1964, Marina Oswald was called to testify for the last time. There she dramatically produced the bus tickets. Senator Richard Russell, then a member of the Warren Commission, reminded Marina of her previous testimony and the fact that she knew nothing about bus tickets then. She testified, "I found the stub of this ticket approximately two weeks ago when working with Priscilla Johnson on the book. Three weeks ago I found the stub among old magazines, Spanish magazines, and there was a television program also in Spanish and there was the stub of this ticket. But this was, you know, a piece of paper and I didn't know this was a ticket." She discovered that it was a ticket, she testified, when she showed it to Priscilla Johnson.

Russell obviously did not believe the story. He asked why Lee would keep magazines in Spanish if, as Marina had previously testified, he could not read Spanish. Marina replied, "It was not a Spanish magazine." Russell asked how this document could possibly have escaped the extensive search of the FBI agents who were looking for such evidence, and who had examined every scrap of paper. There was no responsive reply.

In assessing this near-miraculous find, tickets which had escaped the most thorough and painstaking searches conducted by FBI agents, it would be relevant to look into Priscilla Johnson's background.

Priscilla Johnson had interviewed Oswald in Moscow in 1959, almost immediately after his arrival in the Soviet Union. This interview appears to be the longest ever given to any American journalist by Oswald. Soon after both the President and Oswald had been murdered, Johnson wrote about the origin of her interview for *Harper's Magazine*. "I had sought him out a few hours earlier on the advice of an American colleague in Moscow. A boy named Oswald was staying at my hotel, the Metropol, the friend casually remarked. He was angry at everything American and impatient to become a Russian citizen. 'He won't talk to anyone,' my colleague added, suggesting that, as a woman, I might have better luck."

Johnson's discretion in referring to the contact who led her to Oswald is apparent. He was in her story "an American colleague," "the friend," and finally "my colleague." The man who sent her to Oswald was one of two officers in the consular section of the American embassy in Moscow. The "us" he would refer to in his conversations with Johnson was the American Embassy in Moscow.

The American operative in charge of Oswald for the Embassy was Richard Snyder. When he testified before the Warren Commission Snyder said, "Up until the time I left Moscow, Oswald was my baby." Snyder, according to secret CIA documents, began work for the CIA as a G-9

during 1949. His messages to the State Department about Oswald were based upon intelligence data supplied to him by Priscilla Johnson.

Jerry Policoff, a New York City researcher, closely followed the career of Priscilla Johnson, and mentioned her in a published article. The Boston law firm of Hausserman, Davidson and Shattuck threatened to sue him. They insisted that a retraction must be published because, they alleged, "As to allegations of her being an undercover government employee throughout this period, there exists not even the slightest reasonable foundation for such an allegation." The retraction was not published. Ms. Johnson did not sue.

During April of 1967, the CIA staged one of the major coups in its history. It arranged for the defection from the Soviet Union of Svetlana Alliluyeva, the daughter of Joseph Stalin. When Alliluyeva arrived in the United States, the Voice of America, the broadcasting service of the United States Information Agency, sent news of her arrival all over the world, including the Soviet Union where it was broadcast in Russian. Radio Free Europe, a "private broadcast operation" funded by the CIA, dispatched the word throughout Eastern Europe from its studios in Munich.

During the great international brouhaha following her defection, Svetlana Alliluyeva spent her days in seclusion, at a site approved by American intelligence and the State Department, with Priscilla Johnson. The site was the home of Priscilla Johnson's parents. The *New York Times*, upon the arrival of Stalin's daughter, said that it would publish her forthcoming memoirs. Priscilla Johnson was assigned by Evan Thomas — who had edited William Manchester's defense of the Warren Report for Harper and Row and who would also supervise the editing of the Alliluyeva book — to translate Svetlana Alliluyeva's work for Harper and Row.

Alliluyeva and Lee Harvey Oswald had perhaps shared but one moment in common: both had been interviewed by Priscilla Johnson before leaving for the United States. •

